

Message Text

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22-11

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCS-03 SCA-01 PPT-01 CIAE-00 INR-07

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R 080340Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4269

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SINGAPORE 0078X

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CPRS, SN

SUBJECT: EXPULSION OF REVEREND ROBERT FERGUSON FROM SINGAPORE

REF: STATE 002892

1. REVEREND ROBERT FERGUSON CALLED ON CONSULAR OFFICER BIDDICK ON DECEMBER 18 TO ADVISE THAT SINGAPORE IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES HAD CANCELED HIS EMPLOYMENT PASS AND THE RESIDENT PERMITS OF HIS DEPENDENTS ON THE SAME DAY, AND THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 25. ALTHOUGH HE INDICATED TO BIDDICK THAT HIS WORK WITH HIS CONGREGATION HAD LARGELY BEEN COMPLETED, HIS EMPLOYMENT PASS HAD BEEN VALID UNTIL SOMETIME DURING FEBRUARY, AND HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY IT SHOULD BE CANCELED. FERGUSON EXPLAINED THAT INITIALLY HE HAD RECEIVED A SUMMONS FROM IMMIGRATION SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE, REQUESTING HIM TO REPORT TO THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE. HE HAD DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH A SINGAPOREAN LAY LEADER OF HIS DENOMINATION, ANDREW YEO, WHO CHECKED WITH IMMIGRATION AND SUBSEQUENTLY TOLD REVEREND FERGUSON THAT THE MATTER WAS UNDER INVESTIGATION AND THE SUMMONS COULD BE DISREGARDED. FERGUSON DID NOT CONSULT THE CONSULAR OFFICER AT THAT TIME.

2. IN MID DECEMBER FERGUSON RECEIVED A SECOND SUMMONS FROM IMMIGRATION. WHEN HE REPORTED TO THE IMMIGRATION

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OFFICE ON DECEMBER 18 HE WAS TOLD THAT HIS EMPLOYMENT PASS

HAD BEEN CANCELED BECAUSE OF HIS ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES DETRIMENTAL TO THE NATIONAL INTERESTS OF SINGAPORE. WHEN HE TRIED TO FIND OUT PRECISELY WHAT ACTIVITIES HE WAS SUSPECTED OF BEING INVOLVED IN, THE IMMIGRATION OFFICER TOLD HIM " YOU KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE DONE."

3. FERGUSON THEN CALLED ON CONSULAR OFFICER BIDDICK THE SAME DAY TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION AND ASKED IF THERE WAS ANYTHING THAT COULD BE DONE. FERGUSON WAS TOTALLY MYSTIFIED AT THE ACTION OF THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE AND WAS UNABLE TO THINK OF ANYTHING HE HAD DONE. CONOFF CALLED THE ASSISTANT CONTROLLER OF IMMIGRATION ON DECEMBER 19 WHO ALSO REFUSED TO OFFER ANY EXPLANATION EXCEPT TO SAY THAT FERGUSON HAD ENGAGED IN UNETHICAL ACTIVITIES IN SINGAPORE. IN VIEW OF THE ARBITRARY AND UNREASONABLE ATTITUDE TAKEN BY THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE, DCM CALLED DEPUTY SECRETARY, MFA, TAN BOON SENG, DECEMBER 19 TO RAISE MATTER INFORMALLY. DCM TOLD TAN THAT THE EMBASSY FELT REVEREND FERGUSON WAS OWED A MORE PRECISE EXPLANATION AS TO WHY HIS EMPLOYMENT PASS WAS BEING CANCELED AND THAT WE COULD SEE NO REASON WHY IMMIGRATION OFFICE SHOULD REFUSE THE EMBASSY A PROPER EXPLANATION. TAN SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO TAKE THE MATTER UP WITH IMMIGRATION.

4. DCM WAS NOT ABLE TO REACH TAN AGAIN UNTIL DECEMBER 23. TAN SAID IMMIGRATION HAD CONFIDED THAT ROBERT FERGUSON HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN TWO AIR TRANSPORTATION COMPANIES OF DUBIOUS REPUTE AND WAS A BUSINESS ASSOCIATE OF STANLEY BOOKER, A NOTORIOUS FREEBOOTER INVOLVED IN A NUMBER OF QUESTIONABLE AIR TRANSPORT OPERATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA DURING THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS. FROM THIS INFO CONOFF BIDDICK WAS QUITE CERTAIN THAT IMMIGRATION HAD CONFUSED REVEREND FERGUSON WITH ANOTHER ROBERT FERGUSON WHO IS A SOME TIME RESIDENT OF SINGAPORE AND IS ASSOCIATED WITH STANLEY BOOKER. CONOFF CHECKED WITH REVEREND FERGUSON WHO DENIED THAT HE WAS INVOLVED IN ANY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE. DCM IMMEDIATELY INFORMED TAN BOON SENG THAT IMMIGRATION APPEARED TO HAVE MADE A VERY SERIOUS MISTAKE. TAN AGREED TO ARRANGE APPOINTMENT FOR FERGUSON TO MEET IMMEDIATELY WITH A SENIOR IMMIGRATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OFFICER AT 11:00 A.M. DECEMBER 23. UNFORTUNATELY, BY THIS TIME FERGUSON HAD SOLD HIS CAR, ARRANGED TO SHIP HIS HOUSEHOLD EFFECTS AND WAS SCHEDULED TO DEPART SINGAPORE LATER THE SAME DAY. HOWEVER, FERGUSON WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR HIS NAME AT IMMIGRATION, AGREED TO PROCEED TO THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE AT THE STIPULATED HOUR, BUT DID NOT CALL BACK AT THE EMBASSY PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM SINGAPORE TWO OR THREE HOURS LATER.

5. ON JANUARY 5, DURING A CALL ON TAN BOON SENG ON OTHER MATTERS, DCM USED OCCASION TO EXPRESS EMBASSY'S CONCERN OVER THE LAMENTABLE HANDLING OF THE FERGUSON CASE. DCM POINTED OUT THAT ENTIRE MATTER COULD HAVE BEEN EASILY SETTLED IF THE IMMIGRATION OFFICER HAD TAKEN CONSULAR OFFICER INTO HIS CONFIDENCE. TAN EXPRESSED DEEP REGRET AND SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD FERGUSON HAD MET WITH THE IMMIGRATION OFFICER PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE AND THAT IMMIGRATION HAD APOLOGIZED FOR THE ERROR. TAN SAID HE HAD SEVERELY CHASTISED THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE OVER ITS HANDLING OF THE CASE, AND HAD POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS NO CONSOLATION TO REVEREND FERGUSON TO BE TOLD JUST PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE THAT THE WHOLE THING HAD BEEN A BIG MISTAKE. HE SAID HE HAD POINTED OUT TO IMMIGRATION THAT THE FIRST THING IT SHOULD HAVE DONE WHEN IT RECEIVED DEROGATORY INFORMATION ON REVEREND FERGUSON WAS TO HAVE CHECKED WITH THE EMBASSY. TAN ASKED THE DCM TO PROVIDE A LETTER EXPRESSING OUR CONCERN OVER THE INCIDENT AND SAID HE WOULD BE ABLE TO USE THIS LETTER TO TRY TO PERSUADE IMMIGRATION TO CORRECT ITS PROCEDURES. LETTER IS CURRENTLY BEING DRAFTED.

6. COMMENT: IN VIEW OF TAN'S FORTHCOMING ATTITUDE, WE BELIEVE THERE IS GOOD CHANCE THAT GOS WOULD BE WILLING TO ISSUE A NEW WORK PERMIT IF FERGUSON DECIDES TO RETURN TO SINGAPORE. HOWEVER, TAN IS CURRENTLY IN MANILA ATTENDING THE ASEAN SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING AND WILL NOT RETURN TO SINGAPORE UNTIL SOMETIME NEXT WEEK. SINCE HE HAS BEEN SO PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN THIS CASE, WE THINK IT BEST TO DELAY APPROACHING THE GOS ON THIS MATTER UNTIL HE RETURNS. EMBASSY IS SLIGHTLY MYSTIFIED AS TO WHY FERGUSON WISHES TO RETURN SINCE WE HAD RECEIVED THE IMPRESSION THAT HIS WORK IN SINGAPORE HAD BEEN LARGELY COMPLETED. WE THINK LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOS MAY ALSO HAVE THE SAME IMPRESSION AND MAY WONDER WHETHER WORK REMAINING HERE IS SUFFICIENT TO WARRANT ISSUANCE OF A WORK PERMIT.
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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
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